

Torbjørn Rødland

NEW YORK,
at Albus Greenspon

by David Ebony



Torbjørn Rødland: *The Measure*, 2010, C-print, 43¼ by 55½ inches; at Albus Greenspon.

A refined and individualistic worldview is something that usually takes an artist many years to develop and that unfolds for the viewer over the course of several exhibitions. This seems especially apt in the field of photography, where the current glut of images makes it difficult for artists to cultivate a new and unique means of visual expression. The Norwegian-born, Los Angeles-based Torbjørn Rødland is an exception. While Rødland's work has appeared in several exhibitions in the U.S. and abroad over the past few years, this was, surprisingly, his New York gallery solo debut. Via the 15 works on view, he conveyed an intensely personal approach to his subject matter, and a cohesive clarity of vision that appeared fresh, yet fully realized and well seasoned.

Taken over the past five years, these large and medium-size photos included widely divergent pictures of people, places and things, as well as several abstract photos of colorful collagelike constructions. The best pieces share a subtle theatricality. *Partner* (2008), for instance, a large (approximately 4½-by-4-foot), gorgeous black-and-white photo, shows a young Asian girl wearing an oversize men's shirt. She crouches down to pick up a large plaster bust of Homer set on the floor. The work perhaps suggests a sociopolitical theme: Eastern youth embracing Western culture. The composition's evocative formal attributes, such as brilliant backlighting on the left and delicate shading in the center and right, also contribute to the picture's haunting allure.

Similarly dramatically lit and equally striking, *The Measure* (2010) features a small, androgynous child, shirtless and blond with a pageboy hairdo, sitting rather calmly and attentively inside a dog crate. Casually strewn atop the right-hand corner of the cage, a pair of adult trousers partially blocks the illumination from a light source near the cage door. The picture might hint at a scene of

abuse, but Rødland emphasizes the child's expression, which is mischievous rather than apprehensive.

A consistent strain of understated humor united many works in this show. One of the most melodramatic pieces, *Black Ducati* (2010), shows two women seated on a motorcycle. The figure riding in back is incongruously nude except for her bulky crash helmet. *Twintailed Siren* (2011) presents, against a solid black background, a side view of a nude model pressing an empty Starbucks iced coffee cup between her buttocks. A less talented photographer would no doubt highlight the vulgarity of such an image, while Rødland's novel, deadpan approach underscores its playful absurdity.